

Gastrosophy today: can Charles Fourier's vision of food become a model for 21st-century food empowerment projects?

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Abstract: French utopian writer Charles Fourier coined the word gastrosophy to describe a science which would merge gastronomy, cooking, agriculture and preserving food. Fourier's goal, contrary to what was generally being done in the 19th century, was not so much to feed the poor but to reach a certain equality before food: the poor man would not eat *as much* but *as well* as the rich man. However, when his followers found ways to put his ideas into practice they encountered very practical problems which quickly led to an emphasis on the sole agricultural side of gastrosophy, leaving aside the other elements. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that Fourier's ideas resonate today in what happens both in France and in Great Britain where the same issues (adulterated food, tasteless and standardized vegetables) bring forth the same answer as what Fourier had proposed in many ways. I will try and form a picture of Fourier's ideas on gastrosophy and more specifically on the education to taste. I will also attempt to introduce the movements which seem to be the most representative gastrosophist endeavours emerging in the 21st century. My last demonstration will discuss the political implications of gastrosophy today particularly as far as food justice is concerned when inequalities as far as access to healthy food are far from being bridged

Keywords: utopia, food activism, food justice, education

Résumé: L'écrivain socialiste utopique Charles Fourier a été le premier à utiliser le mot gastrosophie pour décrire une science qui réunit la gastronomie, la cuisine, l'agriculture et la conservation des aliments. Le but de Fourier, contrairement à ce qui se faisait à son époque, n'était pas tant de nourrir les pauvres mais bien d'atteindre une certaine égalité devant l'alimentation. Ainsi les pauvres ne mangeraient pas autant mais aussi bien que les riches. Cependant, lorsque ses adeptes ont mis ses idées en pratique ils ont rencontré des

problèmes pratiques qui ont vite mené à l'adoption des idées sur l'agriculture et à laisser de côté les autres aspects de la gastrosophie. Néanmoins, il est intéressant de remarquer que les idées de Fourier trouvent un écho dans ce qui se passe aujourd'hui en France et en Grande-Bretagne où les mêmes inquiétudes (sur la nourriture frelatée, les légumes insipides et calibrés) amènent les mêmes réponses que ce que Fourier avait proposé. J'essaierai donc d'expliquer les idées de Fourier sur la gastrosophie et plus spécifiquement sur l'éducation au goût. Je tenterai aussi d'introduire les mouvements qui semblent être les plus représentatifs parmi les entreprises gastrosophiques émergeant au 21^{ème} siècle. J'analyserai enfin les implications politiques de la gastrosophie aujourd'hui en ce qui concerne la justice alimentaire.

Mots-clés: utopie, militantisme alimentaire, justice alimentaire, éducation

Introduction

A utopian thinker, according to Friedrich Engels, and a visionary, if we read his followers' writings, Charles Fourier described, in his richly evocative books, how society had reached a dramatic point from which it could only collapse or change into a completely different world. "Harmony" is the name he gave to this new world, "Civilisation" refers to his contemporary society. With scientific rigour and a quasi-obsessive interest in numbers and calculations, Fourier meticulously drew the picture of men and women's future lives once Civilisation had been crushed, and Harmony had sprung to life. A large part of his demonstration was devoted to the extensive taxonomy of human beings according to their age, personalities or talents. Such classification was destined to organize the work, love life and eating habits of groups of people: the inhabitants of Harmony would be enticed to work and live according to the principle of Universal Attraction, which could only work if they harbored feelings of friendship, competition, and emulation. It would not result in the stasis of some utopian worlds (like Cabet's for instance), and people would be encouraged to belong to several "series"¹. For instance, whoever enjoyed working in the orchard would be

part of an appropriate group without having to relinquish the pleasure of working in the kitchen if it pleased them, and would also be able to join the “preserving of peaches” group.

It remains a matter of puzzlement to notice that in many intentional communities that were attempted based on Fourier's ideas, the new society was created without paying too much attention to what Fourier considered the two main motivations for human action: love and food. It may have been because the pages dedicated to those two subjects were amongst the hardest to imagine as feasible – or even as acceptable – for a nineteenth century reader. In fact, not only did they savour too much of utopia, but they also shook the time's ideas on gender and the role of pleasure in society.

This essay focuses on Charles Fourier's proposals for a comprehensive food doctrine based on education, and reflects on the possibility of using them today. Foucault extensively explained how the passage from an agriculture which caters to the need of a small community to a more global system that would inevitably be implemented should the urban population increase would have detrimental effects both on people and on the environment. He also devoted a large part of his writings on food to the necessity to teach adults and children how to taste food, cook, sew, reap and preserve; his idea was to transform people into *gastrosophers*. The idea did not receive much credit in the 19th century, and was not considered as central enough to attract attention. However, now that our Western societies have reached a point in which a majority of the population does not starve, many consider that it is high time we start paying attention to what we eat and care for the people who bring food to our plate. Through the investigation into what such projects as the Slow Food movement and other ventures currently propose, I will examine the possibility of considering gastrosophy as a valid answer to food-related issues, proposing solutions to bridge food inequality today. Although I am not a sociologist, for the last part of my essay I conducted several interviews with Members of the Scottish Parliament (John Scott, MSP from the Conservative party, and Richard Baker, MSP from the Liberal-Democrat Party) and also with Pete Ritchie, President of the Nourish association, in order to get a clearer picture of the current actors in the food world.

Fourier's philosophy: changing the food system to prevent apples from being the only fruit

Coming back from Normandy one day where he had bought an apple for a very cheap sum of money, Fourier was outraged to see Brillat-Savarin – the famous gastronome – pay one hundred times that amount of money for the exact same produce in the French capital. He deduced from that fact that trade was the prerogative of utter scoundrels. Proud of that discovery, he immodestly claimed that that apple was the fourth to have had an influence over humanity: Eve's apple, Paris's apple, Newton's and finally his. "All the essential classes, the landowner, the farmer, the manufacturer, and even the government, find themselves enslaved by an inferior class, by the trader." (Fourier 1841: 332) Fourier thought that, because of free and unchecked competition, many small shops had no other choice but to become bankrupt; many farmers could barely live off what they produced and sold because they were cornered by banks and money-lenders. That "commercial spirit" was the direct reason why a small minority of people ate decent food and in large quantities and why the rest of the population was left with the dregs:

[the multitude] is deprived even of healthy and vital food: in Paris 3,000 or 4,000 gastrolatrous can be seen as they gorge themselves as much as they can, while next to them 300, 000 to 400, 000 plebeians cannot even eat natural soup: they are now given a sham broth made with ingredients which smell of rancid lard, wax, and stagnating water. The commercial spirit is growing, and its guile oppresses more and more the inferior classes. (Fourier *Nouveau Monde Industriel et Sociétaire* 1973: 308-309)

The main issue at stake seems to be the extreme deprivation of some who live with no enjoyment whatsoever: gastronomy in Civilisation is wrong because, in order for a minority of people to eat in abundance there are millions who work like slaves in the fields, never seeing the benefits of what they do, never reaping what they sew. When the farmer enjoys the produce of what he has cultivated, when the factory worker is able to eat well, then gastronomy will be a viable science. It will be reasonable once "it adds to the well-being of the working multitude, and once the people are able to take part in those refinements of good fare which Civilisation reserves to the idle" (Fourier NMIS: 259).

Fourier insisted on the fact that the differences between the very rich and the very poor increased and were illustrated by that food question. In Harmony, there would be the achievement of a form of social equality. Quality would also be combined with quantity and variety, a necessary element since Harmonians would eat five times a day and would see the repetition in dishes as a most tedious thing. To any reader, that accumulation of meals would certainly seem unhealthy, but in Harmony food combinations are seriously studied in order to eat as lightly as possible.

Health was actually an area which Charles Fourier thought was closely linked to food, and thus should have a place in gastrosophy. More often than not, he had seen starving children or people whose health was affected because of what they ate: "Fourier put into perspective the quality of food with the population's health. Thus, infertility was higher in town where people ate bad products than in the countryside where people were still relatively protected from the rat race to adulterated products by modern productivist capitalism." (Onfray 2008: 249) Again, the mercantile spirit had a direct effect on the quality of goods which in their turn affected people's health as even the most basic of food was tampered with by merchants in order to sell more: "[...] in Paris, one could not find a sugarloaf that would not be blended with sugar beet, not a cup of pure milk, not a glass of pure spirit." (Fourier NMIS: 455) On the other hand, his opinion was that often food could be a cordial and that gastrosophy could also become medicine. People are sometimes cured of a cold thanks to grogs or other spirits, he says, then why not devise a preventive medicine developed from fruit and vegetables? "That medicine will be a branch of the science called hygienic gastrosophy, both curative and preservative; because it will speak against food excesses, thanks to the affluence and variety of tasty dishes, by the rapid succession of pleasures accompanying and diverting from the act of eating." (Fourier NMIS: 260) In order to preserve the Harmonians from diseases, in order to use gastronomy to cure them, Fourier dreamt of a "preserving medicine" (Fourier *Nouveau Monde Amoureux*: 130) which was widely unknown to Fourier's contemporary but resonates to us as something akin to dietetics.

Once Harmony is achieved, there will be two main pivots of society, Love, and

Gluttony: "In a communitarian society, gluttony will be a source of wisdom, enlightenment and social agreements." (Fourier NMIS: 253) Not only is it a wise science but in Fourier's world, gluttony ceases to be one of the seven deadly sins to become an essential piece of machinery in the formation of the new human being. At the end of the 18th century and in the 19th century, Grimod de la Reynière and Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin ushered in the art of French eating, a French gastronomy which Fourier considered as incomplete as long as only a minority would have access to it. In Harmony, eating well, and eating a lot will be part of the necessary luxury leading to a hedonistic society: according to Fourier, eating dry bread and drinking water are not conducive in any way to any form of happiness. The meals themselves will be important in the way they constitute the tempo of the day: five meals² and four interludes which last for only fifteen minutes and allow for the body to get energy for the next task at hand. Harmonians will be very active people who will always be switching from one activity to another, and they will need to eat often to keep the pace. It will also be important to eat a lot because Fourier said that man must grow in order to reach seven feet and end up with a life expectancy of 144 years. Eating a lot will also be paramount for a very practical reason: agriculture will be so rationalized and the soil so fertile that it will yield huge quantities that should not be wasted for fear of discouraging those who produce food and would not like to see it thrown away. It will be nothing like force-feeding yourself like in a Roman orgy or eating indiscriminably anything, it will be about knowing how to eat and cook a light and varied cuisine mainly composed of fruit, vegetables, and chicken³.

Gastrosophy was a particularly comprehensive science which Fourier devised as gastronomy applied to industrial attraction and hygiene. It is composed of four branches: gastronomy, cooking, preserving, and farming, which are interdependent sectors. It entails that anyone not able to take equal part in the four processes would be an incomplete human being. Hence the importance of educating people so that Harmonians would acquire skills and knowledge in the four areas which concern food, from beginning to end.

Fourier considered that most of his contemporaries knew – and cared – only about the first branch, gastronomy, as men were mainly concerned with the act of eating. Women,

very often, knew about the second branch only, since they were the cooks in the families and farmers about the last one. Knowing about the four elements was the key to gain gastronomical wisdom, to understand that "sublime theory of social harmony." (Fourier *Théorie de l'Unité Universelle*: 113) Fourier lampooned the cooks for not knowing where their fruit and vegetables came from and how they were cultivated, in what soil, by what method. Even farmers, according to Fourier, did not know the first thing about which soil gave the best results for a given selection of crops; a lack of knowledge which, according to him, had devastating effects on the agriculture of his day and age. Rationalizing farming would mean transforming a less qualitative land into a forest or in any case stopping to stubbornly sow melon seeds or plant peach trees in regions where it was unlikely that they would grow into tasty fruits. Then he prescribed the constitution of specialized areas, with a variety of different cultures: "[...] constituencies would only farm the products which suit their soil perfectly." (Fourier NMIS: 304) Fourier writes this in 1829 and may have read oenologist André Jullien who published in 1816 *Toponymie de tous les Vignobles Connus* (Toponymy of all the Wine-Growing Regions) in which he established the notion of terroir as we know it today.

As for the art of preserving food, Charles Fourier exposed the lack of knowledge in that field and the fact that it caused a lot of waste just because people did not know how to deal with the surplus: "France only knows about preserving fruit in eau de vie, and other vileness like rotten pears. The trial phalanstery will have to gather together all branches of artificial preserving, to make them the main task of its first throngs." (Fourier NMIS: 191) Thus, preserving would be taught as well as eating, farming or cooking.

All Harmonians would then be educated in order to become cooks, farmers, food preservers and skilled eaters, all at the same time. Even eating was not done properly according to Charles Fourier, and if Parisians had known about what was good, they would not eat what they ate in Paris at the time of Fourier's writings. He gave very precise examples and dates, asserting, for instance, that since 1826, bakers had only half cooked their bread, a trend which had been adopted as the latest fashion coming from England when it was actually a mercantile subterfuge. Indeed, half-baked dough contains more

water, is heavier and keeps better in case it has to be sold the next day. Similarly, since 1797, the same English fashion instituted the consumption of half cooked meat. So Fourier believed his contemporaries could hardly be given the name of “gastronomers” when they tolerated the fact that merchants were so much in a hurry to sell meat that they did not even wait for animals to be fully mature; when they did not realize that the meat they ate came from animals grazing in fields polluted by pesticides, “from the perfume of some substances which manure the gardens in the suburbs.” (Fourier NMIS: 191). Wine was denatured, blended with treacle, alum, liquorice and other ingredients while farmers were so ignorant that they ruined their potato crops which ended up on the market in such a state that they were practically inedible. According to Fourier, all those heresies came from a lack of education as “a five-year-old child, brought up in Harmony, would find fifty shocking mistakes at any dinner of so-called Parisian gastronomers.” (Fourier NMIS: 305) Fourier did not stop at the mere question of taste and also alluded to the ethics around food. It was about the consumer being cheated and also the environment being wasted and polluted.⁴

Fourier thought that children educated in Harmony would herald the coming of the new man and woman, able to understand what was good for them, their health and their environment. He considered it crucial to make use of children’s natural gluttony and their love of sweet things. In the phalanstery, children were taken care of and educated by the community. They were classified according to their age and temperaments. They had to be the first to be taken to the kitchen to then attract other people to that activity which was too often left to the care of women whether they had chosen that occupation or not. Just as he said that women and children should be seen working in the fields more – doing whatever task which does not require manly strength –, children should not be kept from the kitchen as was the case in the 19th century. People were afraid that they would get hurt with the long knives or the big ovens, but Fourier introduced the idea that children would love to work in the kitchen if they were given tools suitable to their size⁵. Children would be cooking together, according to their own tastes. They indeed love to eat a lot of everything but indiscernibly: “They are no gourmets, they are only gluttonous, voracious and greedy.

They eat green fruit and other vileness avidly; if they were gourmets, connoisseurs, they would give those types of rough food away to pigs." (Fourier NMIS: 261). That is why it is important to cultivate children's palates and cooking skills early on. They would be stimulated by passion, culinary employment, gastronomical refinement: "He [the child] learns to discriminate between twenty nuances of flavours on any vegetable, from chervil to parsley – farmed by himself." (Fourier TUU: 507) Educating taste buds would make children experts in the discrimination between flavours and in the classification of tastes: 3,000 flavours in eggs and chickens will be distinguished in the phalanstery, a task performed by the children. Since everything would be done out of pleasure, the rule would be to consider that education as a game and to follow whatever disposition the children have: "A special kitchen for them, and the free manifestation of their tastes which they will have complete freedom to follow as there will be a demand for it formed by a group of seven children for that dish or that preparation to lunch, dinner, afternoon tea or supper." (Fourier NMIS: 245)

The rule being in the phalanstery that theory must not be not severed from practice, all education would tend towards that goal and children would be skilled cooks as well as knowledgeable gastronomes. Since they would also participate in farming, they would acquire a whole range of knowledge in chemistry and physics. Fourier's plan was to participate in the creation of new men and women who would be too knowledgeable about the food questions to be tricked into eating unhealthy and adulterated produce. Two hundred years later, the same assessment has driven people to work towards the same goal, alarmed as they are by the results of an intensive farming system which has shown to have reached its limits.

Contemporary national and international initiatives in gastrosophy

Gastrosophy as Fourier saw it was a philosophy of food that embraced cooking, eating, preserving as well as farming. Such a broad view of how food should be envisioned is very much illustrated today by the Slow Food movement with its injunctions of Buono, Giusto, Pulito (Good, Clean and Fair). To Carlo Petrini, its very charismatic founder,

gastronomes are not only gourmets and do not only care about what tastes good, but they also think about who it has that made the presence of food on their plate possible and about how to preserve the land for future generations. In the eyes of the Slow Foodists, there is the notion of a land linked to man, in a relationship of bilateral dependency.

Slow Food is an Italian movement that started in 1986 after McDonald's started to talk about a franchise opening on the Piazza di Spagna in Rome. The movement had been brooding for a while in Piedmont and its founder, the journalist Carlo Petrini, had been involved in similar initiatives that sought to involve local people and their own territory like the *cant'e ij euv*⁶ tradition, which was revived in an attempt to rebuild social ties in rural communities. The catalyst, however, for the creation of Slow Food, was that manifestation of yet again food globalization at its most violent. The response was and is nonviolent, as Carlo Petrini and the Slow Food movement are committed to peaceful modes of action, but also to being forces of proposal more than organs of destruction. They propose a parallel way of living, one in which consumers become co-producers since they care about food from the seed to the plate and see themselves as actors in the food production process. As Petrini said, "our vision is holistic, ubiquitous and complex. You can't consider food from only one point of view, seeking only and separately what is good, clean or fair." (Petrini 2013: 27) Very quickly the movement became global, thereby evincing how universal the interest in food was, as well as in everything which is related. However, the national Slow Food organisations are very much the reflection of a territory and not an ideological calque of the Italian Slow Food; hence the fact that the various *convivia*⁷ work differently and are also perceived differently from the local populations.

In the United States, some members of SF California feel frustrated by the failure of SF to be a true political movement. As the article *Mobilising Bodies: Visceral Identification in the Slow Food Movement* points this out as, after interviews conducted in California, the authors have noticed how certain members were frustrated by what they felt as a soft political message: "For example, in *convivia* that approach Slow Food as an 'eating club', SF participants may not learn to interrogate their habits of feeling in regard to food and may instead sediment modes of visceral identification along lines of being part of an elite and

that can appreciate and preserve good food.” (Hayes-Conroy/ Martin 2008: 278) In the UK, SF is very often seen by non-members as a foodies' movement, whose only concern is to eat well with a group of similar minded gourmets. In Scotland, it might seem difficult to contradict those for whom SF is but an upper middle class, bourgeois-bohemian manifestation when one looks at the socio-economic background of the members. In SF Edinburgh, the active members are bloggers, foodies, members of the Green Party, producers, and deli owners. So in a way the criticism of some against SF is justified as the people are all either involved with food professionally or because they are interested in tasting good food. The “clean” and “fair” aspects without which SF is devoid of meaning is hard to find. However, since 2015, SF Scotland has been a registered charity, a status that means they now have three objectives: education, heritage and culture preservation, community development. It may mean they will be enabled by this new status to act in schools to promote healthy eating but also the other principles of SF. In France, the movement is similarly criticized and depending on the regions where the Slow Food Convivium or community is located, the actions are different and range differently.

Carlo Petrini and the Slow Foodists are not the only upholders of the need for a holistic understanding of food, a new gastrosophy. In Scotland, *Nourish* is an association that puts a strong emphasis on the importance of local development, fair wages for producers and the development of a network for farmers, all the while encouraging links between consumers and producers. Their aim is to humanize the food system, to act as a place of resistance and to influence the national system, thus bearing strong ethical and political implications. They campaign more overtly for political change in the agribusiness and try to be as influential as possible by sending members to important EU discussions or by getting involved in Scottish decisions about food. Their current campaigns range from *The Right to Food* Campaign to the proposition for a *Citizens' Agricultural Policy*. The latter puts forward the importance to think ahead of the implementation of Brexit which will mean the end of the CAP and thus will entail the need for a new Scottish agricultural policy. The country should then take the opportunity to devise a fairer system for farmers but also to ask for greener policies and better governance:

The best way to ensure farming policies work for citizens is to include citizens in the policy-making process. Farmers (not just their union) and citizens (not just major NGOs) should be involved in nation-wide debates about the future of food and farming. Do citizens want public money to keep supporting primarily large intensive farms? Do citizens want to continue subsidising the production of barley for whisky, rapeseed for biofuels, and beef fed by Brazilian soya, or would they rather their taxpayers' money supports pesticide-free fruit and veg production? How do farmers think an agricultural policy can support them best to manage a viable business while producing food in a sustainable way? (Nourish website)

In many ways the Nourish members can be said to be gastrosophers who never forget about food from seed to plate, even if they put less stress on the organoleptic value of food, fewer foodies than food activists. The *Incredible Edible* movement, which started in Todmorden, in West Yorkshire, England, in 2008, is now very much an international movement that puts the emphasis on local food. They have less visibility than Slow Food, but their work is very local: it is about using public areas or community places to grow fruit and vegetables. Anyone can come and tend to the different plants, and anyone can come and harvest them. The reception of the concept varies from country to country. In the original town, Todmorden, it was met with huge success and has attracted a lot of goodwill from many inhabitants. In France however, where the movement is present, it takes time to take off but it is important to note that The Incredible Edible, just like Slow Food, is an association that depends on local people and local involvement from inhabitants.

In a much more practical way, in many places in Europe and more particularly in France, the crate system works to increase the percentage of local food in our diets: every week, members get a crate of locally produced vegetables and fruit, sometimes meeting the producer or just going to a meeting point to collect their food. The form of engagement can be minimal: members give money and get organic and local vegetables to feed their family with pesticide-free food, or it can get slightly more intense with the AMAP system (the equivalent of the Community-Supported Agriculture in the United States). With such a scheme, a certain number of consumers gather round several producers whom they assure of their full support by each giving them the amount of money that they need to be able to

produce enough. Whether they have contracts for poultry, dairy products, vegetables or even fish, all consumers have to participate several times throughout the year either by ensuring the crates' distribution or by actually going to the farm and helping with harvesting or picking. The advantage of the system is that it bridges the gap between eaters and producers, the people who feed and those who feed them. In France again, l'Université du Goût in Argentan, Normandy, the University of Taste, was started by philosopher Michel Onfray. It started from an interesting finding: an association working in a community garden with destitute people quickly noticed that when people were given vegetables other than potatoes, they would discard them because they had no idea what to do with them.⁸ Today there are cooking classes, events around the vegetable garden concept, concerts and talks on gastronomy. Thinking more about what we eat and how we eat is the aim of that University. Unfortunately, it runs only from May to October, probably since it lacks enough volunteer workers to function all year round. Those organisations or initiatives are but a few among those that exist today and that emerge every day. What remains to be seen is whether their political value can be effectively used to make sure that gastronomy stops being seen as elitist. Gastrosophy, the taking into account of all the issues around food, should be able to do just that.

Gastrosophy: a political answer to food inequalities

It is undeniable that there are numerous citizen-based initiatives that have decided to take the question of food into their hands whatever their scope and the issues they tackle, but there is often a doubt as far as their political message is concerned. Moreover, is their range far-reaching enough to entail a societal change, the very transformation that Charles Fourier wanted to reach when he devised plans for Harmony? The difficulty may lie in the nature of the cause. For most people, food does not bear political or ethical implications, whatever their socio-professional position. Only today do we see the rise of a concern for our health or for animal welfare but they are very often deemed a personal choice: if you want to be a vegan, for instance, you are free to be so. However, does society at large really believe the subject is important and wonders at the reasons why some people

abandon an omnivore's diet? It should be noticed that only two out of the eleven candidates for the recent presidential election in France (2017) mention agroecology or the importance of taking action for farmers who commit suicide at rates that are truly worrying but that rarely make the headlines. The environment is somehow more in the foreground but how can the link not be made between that question and the issue of food?

When I interviewed Members of the Scottish Parliament on the question of food, I noted that it was sometimes seen as a tourist attraction, a way to get more people to visit certain regions of Scotland (E.g. *Taste of Grampian* which is a food festival dedicated to local food from the North East of Scotland). There is certainly a value in highlighting local food for tourists but it cannot stop at that, or it falls short of really tackling what it is that makes the obesity figures continue to rise. Regions of France have the same kind of approach to food. They have food festivals where they gorge on snails for a day or on shallots or lamb or cheese, but I have yet to find a festival that links the food and the practices that permit the production and the livelihood of the farmers.

In Scotland, a Food Commission meets two or three times a year at the parliament in Holyrood to discuss production, supply chains, food access and poverty, among other concerns. But while those crucial matters are discussed, the number of food banks increases and no decisive steps are being taken. More often than not communities are left to their own devices, and in such instances, if governments do not do anything to oppose a McDonald's in a historical place or to help destitute people obtain access to healthy food then civil society considers it will take matters into its own hands. As I conducted interviews of the people involved in those organisations. I heard them complaining several times about a lack of initiative from the governments. The Scottish government is viewed by Pete Ritchie, leader of *Nourish*, as being quite confused and not knowing how to act⁹, so relying on the community, an old recipe of the British government, which has always relied on strong communities, whether religious or secular. To put it simply, some see their own initiatives as ways to resist (like *Nourish*) against those who control the system. Raj Patel's argument, in his book *Stuffed and Starved* (2008), the food is available, but not everybody gets to eat. So it is a question of power, of who pulls the strings of the global food system.

Thus it becomes a political question or should at least be viewed as such. Kilien Stengel makes an important point when he states that gastrosophy is a means for man to be anchored in the world and his community and that the food system is far from being a neutral subject: "If man is honest with himself, he will recognize that gastronomic responsibility also bears environmental and humanitarian dimensions." (Stengel 2011: 26) He considers passivity in those matters as wrong and as something we should resist. Gastronomism is about ethics and ethical choices, and "Gastronomism, synonymous with gastronomic ethics, must be the warden of a responsible man against the eating man, slave to what is on offer and to the economic marketplace." (Stengel 2011: 103). However, depending on where one lives, resistance takes different forms: in the so-called developed world, the initiatives are started by mostly middle class and upper-middle class citizens while in the developing world there is a farmers' resistance with Slow Food and Terra Madre¹⁰ or the Via Campesina¹¹: a resistance to the big multinationals and to what some see as an immovable order of things. It is unfortunate, though, that some people get left out of that equation, namely the poor in developed countries, those who do have access to food, who are not starving but are the victims of cheap meat, sugar-powered drinks and pesticide-laden fruit.

This is why it is high time that Slow Food or other initiatives get state help with their work in this area: they do a lot with farmers outside of Europe which is very far from the gourmet club that it looks like to some of us. Nevertheless, our very neighbours are literally forgotten. So what can gastrosophy, which to some sounds like a utopian idea, bring to this food order? First, the idea of the local is very present in citizen-based initiatives; it is about doing something with what is available in a given place with the individuals who live there; and telling people about where they live is sure to create more involvement on their part¹² as they are more engaged when they become co-producers. The power of the local community is embodied by Slow Food, Nourish, the Incredible Edible and the AMAP system in France (CSA in the UK).

So even though there seems to be a lack of inclusion of all the different categories of society in those initiatives, it is a good starting point to begin with the place where people

really are, if only to show that good food is not reserved for the elites but can be reached where they live. The philosopher Peter Singer mitigates the argument of the local: “If we have the choice of using our purchasing power in our local economy, or buying products imported, under fair terms of trade, from some of the world’s poorer nations, is there any merit in keeping our money within our own community?” (Singer 2006: 127) However, even though the choice of the local is not always the most ethical choice, it is a very efficient way to bridge the existing gap between buyers and farmers: when consumers do not simply purchase their food from a supermarket and actually go to the local farm, they realise what it means to be a producer, where the vegetables or the milk and eggs actually come from. That is how the value of food can become central again and not something remote from our concerns, only to be bought from the shelf of an aseptic store.

The second point of gastrosophy which is made by Fourier is education regarding taste but also regarding farming realities, to the territories that map the world. Slow Food has its own University of Gastronomic Sciences in Florence with several Master’s Courses which is extremely comprehensive and interesting: a *Master in Food Culture and Communications* or a *Master of gastronomy: Food in the World*. It focuses on the organisation’s threefold mantra. The Food faculty at St Margaret’s University in Edinburgh also has in its curricula, courses on food hygiene, food tasting, food justice, food and social movements which result in a very sweeping, Fourierist, vision. Those are classes destined to adult students, but Fourier had in mind the education to taste of children in order for them to understand about flavours but also cooking, farming, etc. To be called gastrosophical, food activism should really follow his ideas on learning by doing and on emphasizing the education to smells and savours since it is something that must be done at an early age¹³. Today's campaigns on eating five fruit and vegetables a day declined in almost all developed countries of the world, have proved to be failures since obesity figures keep rising. So it is not about being advised how to eat and even knowing what is good for us, it has to be ingrained behaviour learned from a young age.

Furthermore, there is a third progressive point that gastrosophy can help with. It would be to restore food to its true place, to its true meaning in our lives, to its former place

of an important ritual because it brings conviviality, because it is a way of sharing some pleasure with others. Many would argue that it is elitist, but the real elitism would be to believe that some people are not fit for the enjoyment of good food. Fourier thought that once everybody gets fed and well-fed, getting enjoyment from very simple meals, then we'll have achieved equality and social justice. It would be important to realise pretty soon how far the developed world is from such a reality. It is still a utopia:

Poverty makes eating a healthy diet harder in numerous ways. It's not just because it is far more expensive, gram for gram, to buy fresh vegetables than to buy heavily processed carbohydrates. Maybe you live in a "food desert" where nutritious ingredients are hard to come by or in housing without an adequate kitchen. Growing up poor can engender a lifetime of unhealthy food habits because a narrow diet in childhood is likely to narrow your food choices as an adult, even if your income later rises. (Wilson 2015: 27)

There are food deserts indeed, and poverty is also an issue, but there can also be a cultural barrier to healthy cooking and a lack of education to it. Hence the fact that schools should do their share and educate children's taste. The Classes du Goût¹⁴ that were started in France in the 1970s purported to do just that and are now implemented in Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Switzerland. Extensively used in Scandinavian countries, they were the starting point of whole, extensive projects and have met with huge success in training children's tastebuds. It is a shame that in France they are only used in primary schools when children are between nine and ten years old and for only twelve one-hour classes. I do not think this is enough and the fact that the obesity figures have risen among French children is proof that it is not sufficient.

Conclusion

We can wonder whether the food initiatives that are blooming today are only the manifestations of something fashionable. In other words, is it only that it is trendy to be involved in food activism or are we witnessing a stronger upheaval? I think both statements are true. It is indeed in the spirit of the times to be interested in food, as the number of

cooking contest programmes on French and British television can testify. However, when one looks at the menu in primary schools in France, it is appalling to see how poorly devised they are. It is difficult to assess the situation in Scotland and there is rarely a real canteen and enough time for pupils to really enjoy lunch together. As long as the culture of unhealthy food is not changed, the Scottish NHS will continue to hold conferences on food-related health problems in their country. The situation is not written in stone and any country can change its diet (Japan did, with tremendously positive results), although there will be a need for a little help from governments which cannot stop at simple campaigns anymore but will have to be more proactive and take action, especially regarding young people and food. It was maybe a utopia when Charles Fourier wrote his books but it is not an unattainable one today and if Oscar Wilde was right, then we should all set sail towards that utopian island and decide that this is where we want to live.

NOTES

¹ The work groups that Harmonians would choose according to their inclinations.

² 5 am, 8 am, 1 pm, 6 pm, 9 pm will be the times when meals should be taken, and they should not last for more than two hours. (Fourier *TQM*: 268)

³ "Chicken was created by God to be the most precious and healthy food. It is also the most universally preferred either for its flesh, eggs or other numerous uses." (Fourier *TUU*: 675)

⁴ Michael Pollan or Peter Singer advocate much of the same two centuries later, that and the idea that education has a role to play in the fashioning of more enlightened conscious beings.

⁵ "Children like to fuss about in the kitchen. They would love to participate if they were given all the little tools like miniature pots and pans and cauldrons: it would be heaven to them." (Fourier *TUU*: 515)

⁶ *The cant'e ij euv* tradition was a custom in the North of Italy involving traditional musicians who went to people's houses to sing and play music in exchange for a meal. (Andrews, 2008 : 7)

⁷ A convivium is a local Slow Food group.

⁸ Bee Wilson makes the same assessment in *First Bite*: "Even assuming you manage to lay your hands on a supply of fresh produce, there's the question of how to cook it." (Wilson 2015: 238)

⁹ November 4th, 2016 interview at the Nourish headquarters in Midlothian.

¹⁰ The network of small-scale producers that practise a family agriculture in Africa, Latin America and Asia.

¹¹ The Via Campesina is an international movement which started in 1993. "La Via Campesina comprises about 164 local and national organizations in 73 countries from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas. Altogether, it represents about 200 million farmers. It is an autonomous, pluralist and multicultural movement, independent from any political, economic or other type of affiliation.", Via Campesina website.

¹² Jonathan Schifferes, conference on "Measuring your social impact: Community Food Projects in Action", NHS Conference in Perth, Scotland, November 3rd, 2016.

¹³ "But we haven't paid enough attention to another consequence of being omnivores, which is that eating is not something we are born instinctively knowing how to do, like breathing. It is *something we learn*." (Wilson, 2015: XIV)

¹⁴ The Taste Classes

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Gastrosophy today: can Charles Fourier's vision of food become a model for 21st-century food empowerment projects?

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